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ABSTRACT

This report is based on a forum on the topic of universal access to prekindergarten programs, "Toward a New Education Framework: Expanding the Boundaries To Include UPK," held in December 2000 with 30 education leaders from Connecticut, New York, South Carolina, and Vermont. The goal of the forum was to provide an opportunity for school superintendents to share strategies for linking prekindergarten programs to the K-12 public school system as well as to develop recommendations for education leaders in New York and in other states who are implementing universal prekindergarten programs. The report summarizes sessions focusing on such issues as professional development and certification of early childhood educators, the role of early childhood programs in ensuring school readiness, financing strategies for providing universal access, and the importance of engaging community-based early childhood programs in the implementation of universal prekindergarten systems. The report concludes with a list of the forum participants and the agenda. (KB)

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EMBRACING OUR CHILDREN

A REPORT BASED ON
A FORUM ABOUT UNIVERSAL ACCESS
TO PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

POCANTICO PAPER N° 3

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POCANTICO CONFERENCE CENTER
OF THE ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND
DECEMBER 6–8, 2000

PREPARED BY
CHILD CARE ACTION CAMPAIGN

POCANTICO PAPER Nº 3

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PREFACE

In the year 2000, after a review of its education-related funding priorities, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund identified early childhood education and care as an area to which it would devote a considerable share of its Education program resources. One factor influencing this decision was New York State's national leadership in mandating statewide access to prekindergarten for all children, a policy referred to as universal prekindergarten, or UPK. Adopted in 1997, this policy is now in the implementation phase. Today, over 40 states are moving forward on prekindergarten initiatives. To advance this agenda and to inform its own grantmaking program in early childhood education, the RBF decided to fund a policy forum for leaders in the prekindergarten field.

The meeting, which was held at the Fund's Pocantico Conference Center on December 6–8, 2000, was convened by the Child Care Action Campaign in collaboration with the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Resource Partnership, which is a joint effort of Child Care, Inc. and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. Like the RBF, the convening organizations feel strongly that school systems must work in partnership with Head Start agencies, child care centers, and community groups to develop quality child care and early education initiatives for young children.

The meeting's primary goal was to create an opportunity for reform-minded superintendents to share strategies for effectively linking pre-K and the K-12 public education system and to formulate recommendations for education leaders in New York and other states who are implementing universal systems of early care and education. The meeting also sought to encourage the creation of strategic alliances among participants and a commitment to future collective action.

These outcomes were achieved through small and large group sessions that focused on such issues as professional development and certification of early childhood educators; the role of early childhood programs in ensuring youngsters' readiness for school; financing strategies for universal access to prekindergarten programs; and the importance of engaging community-based early childhood programs in the implementation of UPK systems.

The report that follows summarizes the results of this very stimulating and, I believe, successful forum. The Fund is proud to have played a role in supporting this meeting and grateful to the conference sponsors and participants for their dedicated and effective work in a vitally important area of education.

Annette U. Rickel
Education Program Officer
Rockefeller Brothers Fund

INTRODUCTION

When superintendents champion collaboration among child care, Head Start, and public schools, the success rate of such partnerships is likely to be higher and the outcomes for children greatly improved.[1]

In December 2000, amid the beauty of the Pocantico Conference Center, Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC) convened a group of 30 education leaders for a policy forum, "Toward a New Education Framework: Expanding the Boundaries to Include UPK." The context was the challenge, faced by an increasing number of states, of preparing all children to succeed in school by including early childhood education as a central component of school reform. To learn more about what drives the thinking of reform-minded superintendents, CCAC convened the forum — the first in a series of such meetings around the nation — in New York State, where the implementation of universal prekindergarten is now underway.[2]

The essential role played by visionary, committed school superintendents in building and sustaining viable partnerships between early childhood programs and public school systems was one of the most striking findings contained in CCAC's *Partnering for Success: Community Approaches to Early Learning*. This report profiled exemplary partnerships that have been shown to improve children's readiness for school and their academic achievement. Informed by the findings in *Partnering for Success*, CCAC sought forum participants who were champions of universal prekindergarten and other high-quality early childhood programs and services. Among the attendees were superintendents from the school districts of Syracuse, Binghamton, Ithaca, and Buffalo in New York, school chiefs from Connecticut and Vermont, and South Carolina's state superintendent of education. (A full list of participants appears at the end of this paper.)

The spare aesthetic of Pocantico provided a cool backdrop to the passionate discussions of the forum participants, who focused intensely on issues about which they feel strongly. The forum also produced some surprising revelations about how they are thinking about those issues.

Perhaps the most significant revelation was the degree to which the superintendents attending the forum defy the traditional perception of their role as guardians of the K-12 system. These men and women spoke of "embracing all children" in the communities that comprise their districts, not merely those who occupy seats in the classrooms. This new consciousness manifested itself clearly, through the language and the ideas expressed in the forum discussions.

Most of the conferees articulated the connection between children's rich early experiences and their ability to meet high standards, for which schools are being held increasingly accountable. Opinion was uniform on the importance of clearly and persuasively conveying this message to the participants' colleagues in the education community and to legislators, policymakers, business leaders, and others who will help determine the success or failure of New York State's universal prekindergarten program.

At the same time, the forum revealed a diversity of opinion, and serious questions, about the best means and strategies for expanding the education framework to include UPK and other opportunities for early learning. Disparate views were also expressed about the role of the schools, and superintendents in particular, in implementing prekindergarten programs that include community-based agencies.

[1] Ochshorn, S. (2000). *Partnering for Success. Community Approaches to Early Learning*. New York: Child Care Action Campaign.

[2] For more information about CCAC, see its website: http://www.childcareaction.org/

CREATING A NEW EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

We are really going through such a significant change in the world of education.... The kindergarten students in my school now will live beyond the year 2080. I have no idea what life will be like then. But we are so tied to the structure that we are in. So what is it that children will need to be able to know and do in the year 2020? I am less convinced it is something we can put in this crip than something that is going to be creative and forward thinking.

— RAY MCNULTY, SUPERINTENDENT, WINDHAM SOUTHEAST SUPERVISORY UNION, BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT

In spite of what is known about the positive long-term effects of high-quality early learning, or preschool, experiences, most modern education reform efforts have continued to focus on America's kindergarten-through-grade-12 system. Participants at Pocantico offered a different framework for reform: one born of their shared conviction that current strategies are insufficient—not only to bring all children up to the level that new standards demand, but also to help them become successful, productive members of a new technological society that we are only beginning to define.

Part of this creative approach to education involves expanding the boundaries of the K-12 system to include pre-K programs, such as the one currently being implemented in New York State, as well as other forms of early learning in a variety of settings. In seeking to expand these boundaries, however, several forum participants are confronting American society's longstanding, and often powerful, ambivalence about public institutions' entry into the private realm of the family when very young children are involved. In her opening remarks to the group, South Carolina State Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum provided a clear example of the historic divide between pre-K and the K-12 system and spoke of the intense opposition to First Steps, her state's new broad-scale early childhood initiative:

For so many years, the State Department of Education in South Carolina felt like our mission was K-12. What happened before K really wasn't something we needed to worry about. How children arrived at kindergarten was not something that we understood to be under the Department of Education's umbrella of responsibility.... It was a battle royal to get First Steps started. People thought it was social engineering. They said these programs shouldn't interfere with family life.

The New Milford, Connecticut, superintendent, Mary Jo Kramer, echoed these sentiments in a later plenary discussion. Opposition to providing learning experiences for children—in schools, centers, or other institutions outside the home—during the years from birth to five is "alive and well," Kramer has found, and remains an obstacle at both the community and the state level in the development of early childhood programming.

The Pocantico conferees have been challenging these attitudes in order to create systems that bridge the divide between the early years of life and formal schooling. In doing so, they are conforming to the description of modern superintendents as "village builders" who "can use the centrality of their institutions to help re-create a support system...by reaching outward to connect to the resources of the broader community."[1]

A SHIFT IN LANGUAGE, A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE

The superintendents who participated in the forum are reaching outward in myriad ways. At the most fundamental level, they are using a new vocabulary. They speak of forging a systemic continuum from pre-K through 12; of "embracing our children," meaning all children in their communities, wherever they may be

[1] Houston, P. (2001). Superintendents for the 21st century: It's not just a job, it's a calling. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 82 (6): 428–433.

cared for and educated; of extensive support for families, beginning with prenatal care; of child-centered (that is, developmentally appropriate) practices, not only in pre-K and early elementary settings, but in the more advanced grades as well; of the assessment of young children that reflects their developmental needs; and of "readiness" as a comprehensive concept that includes schools that are responsive to those needs. Their language reflects an expanding vision of education and a changing role for schools as partners in communities. And superintendents are convinced of the need to change the conceptual framework of their colleagues in the education community as well as the language they use.

FROM "K-12" TO "PRE-K THROUGH 12"

If pre-K is to be fully integrated into the education system, educators need to view, and describe, the system as "pre-K through 12." Articulating the importance of this new language, Judith Pastel, superintendent of the Ithaca City School District, made the connection between preschool education and later academic performance and urged the use of preventive, rather than remedial, solutions:

> *We're in this crisis mode of concentrating on high school and having the kids graduated. There is room in that dialogue for the preschool conversation. It makes sense to have that conversation while discussing high school issues or middle school, or the fourth grade English Language Arts assessment. This is a preventive, not reactive, way to solve this. So I think it absolutely has to be in our language all the time.*

Yet the broadening of language is insufficient by itself; attitudes toward curriculum, instruction, and assessment must also change. As Donna DeSiato, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instructional services in the Syracuse City School District, pointed out:

> *The linkage of pre-K with the entire K-12 system is critical. Pre-K needs to be seen as a full member of the school system as well as a full member of the early childhood community. Our pre-K coordinator became director of early childhood. In her role she bears the responsibility for curriculum and instructional alignment of pre-K, first, and second grades—a critical alignment for us. For too long, pre-K has been a separate entity, with its own curriculum, assessments, administration, and support system. The whole linkage and continuity starts with our language, but also with the way we organize our districts.*

Essential to the process is a restructuring of the system in a way that enables children's educational experiences to be part of a seamless continuum. Only with such a new alignment can developmentally sound early childhood practice move beyond the pre-K years into the early elementary grades.

FROM "PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS" TO "OUR CHILDREN"

Embracing the notion of "our children" means adopting a new framework and rejecting the compartmentalization that has long defined the nation's education system. Implied is a new definition of public education and a redefined role for superintendents, one that is more expansive but that also ultimately allows for greater productivity and effectiveness. In the opening plenary of the forum, Ray McNulty proclaimed:

> *As superintendents, I think we need to step up and constantly talk about 'our children.' Those are our children in the district when they are born. We need to embrace that opportunity and do away with the standing at the schoolhouse steps. The more we do that, encouraging our faculty to get involved and looking at the community, I think we'll see it happen. It's going to be subtle, and not a moment in time that we're all going to point to.*

McNulty's comment—which expressed the collective sense of responsibility and concern among his counterparts around the table—unquestionably represented a galvanizing moment in the meeting. As he described it, two weeks after a child is born in Brattleboro, Vermont, McNulty sends a letter to the parents welcoming the child to the high school graduating class of 2018. His letter also describes parenting as life's most important career and offers the district's support in this undertaking. While close

relationships with families have always been a central element of high-quality early childhood programming, this has not typically been the case with school systems.

Other forum participants are also moving away from the tradition of the isolated schoolhouse; they seem convinced of the necessity of reaching out to families early, even before children are born. In Binghamton, for example, Superintendent of Schools James Lee has overseen the creation of a home visiting program—a result of coalitions formed with medical and social service professionals—through which nurses and educators visit nearly 85 percent of the city's population, regardless of income. "We recognized... the influence that a woman's behavior would have during pregnancy on the intellectual and cognitive development of her child," Lee pointed out. To foster early literacy, Judith Pastel in Ithaca is working with pediatricians who are providing books, and writing "prescriptions," for parents to read to their children. "Physicians are buying into it," Pastel said, and this initiative has been made possible by the "collaboration, communication, and attention of the medical community."

Throughout the conference, Ray McNulty's comments about "our children" continued to resonate with his colleagues, who themselves picked up the words and took them for their own.

REDEFINING READINESS

Among those who echoed McNulty's words was Donna DeSiato, who made the connection between focusing on children from birth and ensuring their readiness for school and success in life. "That issue of 'ready to learn' and the whole need to embrace children from the time they are born, or even conceived, is, I think, an important one for us," she said. "As long as we talk about 'ready to learn' as though it doesn't happen until kindergarten, we keep creating the notion that you're not learning until you enter the school system."

Although consensus on the definition of the term "readiness" has remained elusive among policymakers, academicians, and educators, the school readiness agenda has helped propel many of the nation's state pre-K and other early childhood initiatives of the 1990s. In 1990 the National Education Goals Panel proclaimed that all children in the United States should be ready for kindergarten in the year 2000. High-quality preschool was envisioned as one of the key means of attaining that goal—one that, unfortunately, has not been met. "School readiness," it seems, has achieved the status of mantra in the current education reform movement.

STANDARDS AND READINESS

The superintendents' usage of this new language of "readiness" was evident in the two work sessions focused on the role of early childhood programs in the school readiness agenda and also in the plenary discussions.

Ralph Kerr, superintendent of the Olean School District in western New York, described the challenge imposed by the new standards and the difficulty of reconciling different ideas about what children should know and when they should know it. He related the story of a discussion between kindergarten and public school-based pre-K teachers in his district. The kindergarten teachers, he said, insisted that children coming out of UPK programs be able to write their own names. Their pre-K colleagues defined readiness differently. They were less concerned about the children's academic skills and, instead, emphasized the importance of children's comfort in school and their ability to do such things as find their way to the bathroom and behave properly in the classroom. "If I look at these two professionals, both of whom are certified teachers," said Kerr, "who is going to call the final play on that?" Clarification about practice and expectations must also extend to community-based organizations providing pre-K services. "If there isn't some meshing with what the expectations are from there on out, the children are going to be the losers," Kerr concluded.

More than ever before, superintendents today are being held accountable for specific outcomes and are grappling with new and more demanding state standards for student performance.* New York State recently laid down highly rigorous requirements for high school graduation, resulting in curriculum changes along the K-12 spectrum and applying pressure on teachers at the earliest levels.

* President George W. Bush's education plan, for example, calls for an accountability system with sanctions for schools that do not meet performance standards. It also requires annual academic assessments in grades three through eight, as well as a rigorous program of early childhood reading instruction.

ASSESSMENT AND READINESS

In her keynote address, Inez Tenenbaum reflected on the importance of incorporating an approach to evaluating children's readiness for school that is respectful of their developmental needs. South Carolina's State Department of Education staff, she said, had trouble supporting the idea of a cut-off score for the determination of readiness. But the need to be able to say "where the child is" dictated the establishment of certain criteria. Through 2000, when 86 percent of the state's children were considered ready for school, only first graders were tested. In 2001 South Carolina is testing a new form of assessment of kindergartners, which Tenenbaum supports as being more developmentally sound.

But before children can be assessed, there must be a consensus on what "readiness" means. Marion Cañedo, Buffalo's superintendent of schools, proposed a more comprehensive definition of readiness and argued for a kind of assessment that is more compatible with best practice in early childhood education:

> *School readiness is creating the environment for children that allows them to build a background in order for them to be able to begin academic experiences.... People are confusing testing and a fourth grade assessment with standards that are performance-based and are performance-indicated. We can see that when we watch children, which we are trained to do in early childhood development, we can watch how children develop toward the beginnings of meeting those standards.*

Observation, portfolio or work sampling, and other forms of assessment that provide information about children's performance offer a wide range of measures of their progress.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN ENSURING READINESS

Research suggests that transitional program structure and support, which can take numerous forms (including coordinated curricula from preschool through the early grades) may help sustain the social and cognitive benefits of a high-quality preschool experience, particularly for children at risk.[1] "Schools and systems need to be ready for children; children don't need to be ready for us," argued Marion Cañedo. "We need to do a better job of being ready for children, whether they come from home, or from an outstanding or mediocre day care."

In further discussions about providing a strong start for children, the Pocantico conferees emphasized the crucial role of transitional activities in ensuring seamless transitions: pre-K and kindergarten teachers working together; connections between families and schools as they move from pre-K settings to district elementary schools; and collaboration among teachers, principals, and other administrators.

Superintendent Marlene Filewich has adopted a strategy of strong collaboration with the 31 community-based sites that are participating in the UPK program in her district in New York City. She regards the relationship between the district and community-based organizations as a "two-way street." To help build bridges, district staff have been taking part in "parent nights" at community-based organizations and have been facilitating elementary-school visits for parents before their children enter kindergarten.

Similar strategies to create connections and ease the way are being employed by Community School District 13 in Brooklyn, described by Deputy Superintendent Yvette Douglas:

> *We believe that the whole social and emotional piece has an impact on achievement, and so we have been bringing in more and more community-based organizations to service the students. When we go out to the day care centers that will have children coming into our schools, we have orientation sessions and we bring the parents into the school. One of their biggest concerns is: "How do I bring my baby into this building with 900 children, and all these fifth and sixth graders?" So we make sure we never have the very young children in large groups; we keep them self-contained. We also match a kindergarten group with a sixth grade group, we find that it works very well. They nurture those children. So parents see there is no danger.*

[1] Entwisle, D.R. (1995). The role of schools in sustaining early childhood benefits. *In The Future of Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs*. 5(3). Los Altos, CA: The Center for the Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

The Pocantico participants also talked about coordinating the curriculum across the pre-K through elementary years—another essential aspect of creating schools that are more responsive to children's and families' needs. In Donna DeSiato's district in Syracuse, administrators have begun drafting a unified curriculum for pre-K through 12. "[The need for a unified curriculum] sounds like a no-brainer," she said, "but we have always written curriculum in separate sections. The curriculum drives professional development, it drives how we organize our programs, linkages with the community, parental involvement. In many ways, when it is fragmented, it keeps everyone in their own arena."

Structural changes in the curriculum also drive pedagogical practice, which still varies enormously across the spectrum. For the most part, in the K-12 system that has evolved in the United States, teacher-directed practice has been, and continues to be, the norm. Instructors deliver the knowledge, with little allowance for students' different learning styles. The kind of attention paid to individual children's developmental stages and needs that is characteristic of high-quality early childhood programming is generally not integrated into the practice of teachers who work with older children. In conveying to the group the major points of one of the work sessions on strengthening teaching, Marion Cañedo urged that greater attention be paid to child development in all classroom practice:

> *It needs to be provided from pre-K all the way through the early childhood grades, so that this continuity is built into our early childhood programs. And it needs to be accompanied by follow-up, feedback and reflection, opportunities within that environment for cross-grade dialogue, child study, these types of things, which very often do not occur because one program is in isolation from another.*

As programmatic and conceptual linkages between the pre-K and K-12 systems strengthen—as is happening in the more visionary school districts—such continuity is likely to follow.

UPK: A WEDGE FOR CHANGE

New York's universal prekindergarten program offers an opportunity to re-imagine and potentially restructure the state's education system, providing benefits for New York's children and families and serving as a model for other states. Cynthia Gallagher, coordinator of the Office of Child, Family and Community Services at the New York State Department of Education, sees UPK as a wedge for change:

> *A strong piece of our success will be measured by our ability to maintain continuity of best practice across the pre-K-through-12 spectrum. We have led the way in pre-K for developmentally appropriate practices. But it is not unusual in New York to visit a school where the pre-K program is engaging in child-oriented, wonderful instruction and then turn the corner in a school and see teacher-instructed classrooms in kindergarten. I don't know that it is by design. I think it is just a matter of how our systems and our patterns have gotten established. It is time to re-look at how we are forming them. The universal pre-K program is pushing us to do that.*

[Systemic linkage of pre-K and K-12] has to be viewed as a community issue, and in the larger communities, a societal issue. If we look at it strictly as an educational matter, then we compete for fixed resources, and based on our history, support of preschool programs will fall. Whether it's the CEO of a corporation, the governor, or the majority leader of the House, they have to understand the implications both for the individual and society. If we have that kind of enlightened leadership, then it will become part of our fabric, like it is in France and other industrialized nations.

— JAMES LEE, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

All children in our society should have access to a high-quality early childhood education, which is the foundation for academic achievement and a productive future life. Yet many youngsters have not had access to the kind of preschool experiences that provide the stimulation and nurturance they need for maximal development. Early in 2000, a U.S. Department of Education study confirmed that significant numbers of America's children still arrive at school unprepared for kindergarten.[6] Preschool attendance varies considerably by family income: 80 percent of four-year-olds whose families earn more than $50,000 per year attend preschool, compared to approximately 45 percent of four-year-olds from families earning $20,000. Head Start, a major provider of early care and education for low-income families, still only serves about three out of five eligible children. Moreover, the quality of preschool and child care programs also varies considerably, with the majority of programs providing only mediocre quality and just 15 percent rated by child development experts as good to excellent.

Nevertheless, there is great progress to report. Over the past two decades, state-funded prekindergarten programs have blossomed. While only eight states invested in any kind of pre-K program through the 1970s, by the end of the 1990s, 41 states and the District of Columbia had done so. State spending on pre-K initiatives expanded from approximately $200 million in 1988 to nearly $2 billion by 1999 — a steady increase over the decade. The programs vary in scope and form: some states have appropriated funding for Head Start; others offer pre-K to targeted populations, with poverty or family income among the criteria for eligibility; still others, such as Georgia and New York, are aiming toward universal access for all four-year-olds, without regard to income or other criteria.[7]

A NEW YORK STATE PERSPECTIVE

We have a different approach to universal preschool in New York. It is kind of like saying, as a society, that New York State has an investment in these community-based or early childhood programs. We want to bring them up to pre-school quality rather than create new programs entirely.

— CYNTHIA GALLAGHER, COORDINATOR, OFFICE OF CHILD, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

New York's foray into state-funded prekindergarten began in 1966, when the state established Experimental Pre-K (EPK), a program that sought to provide comprehensive early childhood programs to children from economically

[6] West, S., Deaton, K., Germino-Hausken, E. *America's Kindergartners*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

[7] Mitchell, A. (2001) *Pre-kindergarten Programs in the States: Trends and Issues* (PDF). New York: Early Childhood Policy Research, available at the National Child Care Information Center website: http://www.nccic.org/pubs.html

NEW YORK DISTRICTS AT A GLANCE

BINGHAMTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Description: Located in a city of approximately 53,000 in upstate New York, the district serves 6,500 students in seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.

UPK Program: The district serves 75 children in UPK, while the larger Experimental Pre-K (EPK) program has 132 slots for half-day programs and 18 slots for full school-day programs. There are seven UPK classrooms, all of which offer half-day programs with wrap-around (full working day) care options, located in community-based sites.

Partners: BOCES; YMCA; child care

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Title I funds are used at the pre-K level for parent involvement activities

BUFFALO SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Description: Located in a large industrial city of 300,700 residents in upstate New York, the district serves 46,000 students in a total of 77 public schools.

UPK Program: The district serves 870 children in 39 public school sites (all but one providing full school-day programming) and 458 children in 25 community-based sites, all of which are half-day programs.

Partners: YWCA; parochial school; high school; child care

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Title I funds

OLEAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Description: Located in a town of 17,000 in western New York, the district serves 2,709 students in five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

UPK Program: The district serves 64 students in five classrooms, with three of the five classrooms in public school settings. Two of these classrooms are full school-day. In 2001–2002 the district anticipates adding six more UPK classrooms, for a total of three full-day and eight half-day classes.

Partners: YMCA; public library; local housing authority; child care; Head Start

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Even Start; EDGE (Education and Gainful Employment) and Adult Education grants; Community Schools

disadvantaged backgrounds. Today, approximately 19,500 three- and four-year-olds are served by EPK programs in public schools in 97 New York school districts.[8]

Some three decades later, a group of early care and education advocates — including many of the participants at the Pocantico forum—put forth the idea of legislation that would expand the state's prekindergarten program to all children. Emboldened by the new research on brain development, which made clear the critical importance of early childhood experiences, and inspired by the success of Georgia's universal prekindergarten program, the advocates, joined by legislative champions State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Assemblyman Steven Sanders, worked to move the state toward a new phase of education reform.

Their efforts led to the adoption, in 1997, of legislation to enact the Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK) for all four-year-olds. It was passed as part of a larger education improvement bill, known as Learning Achieving Developing by Directing Education Resources (LADDER), which provided financial incentives to encourage districts to reduce early-grade class size, offer full-day kindergarten, provide UPK, enhance technology, and address critical issues concerning facilities for housing UPK programs.

The UPK program was designed to match nationally recognized standards for high-quality early childhood education, and it builds on the success of Experimental Pre-K. The legislation called for a child-centered, developmentally appropriate curriculum that meets the needs of young children and their parents. Other aspects of the program include support services, assessment, parental involvement, and nutritious meals and snacks. In addition, children with special needs, and those who speak another language at home, are to be fully integrated into their district's half- or full-day pre-K programs.

Like many state pre-K programs nationwide, New York's UPK program is not exclusively operated by the schools. Collaboration is the cornerstone, in recognition of the many different places in which children spend their early learning years; most families' need for full-day programs that accommodate work schedules; and the potential for improving quality

[8] Hicks, S.A., Lekies, K.S. and Cochran, M. (1999). *Promising Practices: New York State Universal Prekindergarten.* The Cornell Early Childhood Program. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University.

across all early childhood settings. Collaboration with community-based organizations—Head Start, child care agencies, private child care centers, and nursery schools, among others—is mandated by the legislation; districts must contract at least 10 percent of their UPK funds to organizations outside the public schools.

In 1998–99 (the first year of implementation), 65 districts in the state implemented UPK, with nearly 40 percent of the programs located in community-based sites. In 2000–01, approximately 52,500 children were enrolled in UPK programs in New York State. In this third year of implementation, a total of 162 out of 705 districts statewide—including the five largest school districts—are operating UPK programs, 62 percent of them outside of public school settings. This mandate for subcontracting has helped foster strong relationships between the school district and the early childhood community. UPK advisory boards, established by law in each of New York's school districts, have brought together members of the board of education, district teachers and parents, community leaders, and child care providers, all of whom have had the chance to weigh in on whether and how to implement the program.

> *New York has a pretty high bar for a Masters Degree and Certification.... As wonderful as that is, it will certainly create challenges for us.... It is fine to have the certification requirements, but where are we going to find the teachers in 2004? That will be a major challenge for us, I think, within the next few years.*
>
> CYNTHIA GALLAGHER,
> COORDINATOR, OFFICE OF CHILD, FAMILY
> AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, NEW YORK
> STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

With the implementation of New York's UPK program have come significant challenges on various fronts. The requirement that all UPK teachers be certified in early childhood education will be an increasingly difficult goal to meet for teachers in both public and non-public settings. Programs are facing stiff competition for teachers and will not be able to meet the regulations for certification within the time allotted. Efforts are under way to delay this requirement to ensure more time for the kind of professional development and certification opportunities that early childhood educators will need.

NEW YORK DISTRICTS AT A GLANCE

(continued)

SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Description: Located in a city of 163,000 in western New York, the district serves more than 22,000 students in 21 elementary schools, seven middle schools, four high schools, and two vocational schools.

UPK Program: The district serves 576 children in 21 UPK classrooms. There are also 19 EPK classrooms and one combined UPK-EPK classroom. The majority of the UPK classrooms (19) are in community-based sites, the rest in public school buildings.

Partners: Head Start; child care; nursery school; Salvation Army; Catholic Charities

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds

ITHACA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Description: Located in a small city of 30,000 in upstate New York, the district serves 6,000 students in eight elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, and one alternative school for grades 6–12.

UPK Program: The district serves 78 children in UPK and 164 children in EPK in a blended programming model. The program is located at four public school sites and five community-based organizations.

Partners: child care (including university-based); private school

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Ithaca City School District general fund (tax levy); foundation funding; SED grants

NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #13

District Description: Located in the Prospect Park area of Brooklyn, the district has 18 elementary schools, six middle schools, and one high school.

UPK Program: The district serves 611 students in the UPK program. Twenty-three classrooms are located in school-based sites, all offering full school-day programs. Thirteen classrooms are located in community-based sites, eight of which offer wrap-around care to constitute a full working day.

Partners: Head Start; child care; senior citizens' center

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Title I; Standards Allocation funds

NEW YORK DISTRICTS AT A GLANCE

(continued)

NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #11

District Description: Located in the northern section of the Bronx, the district has 23 elementary schools, seven middle schools, and one high school.

UPK Program: The district serves 1,588 children in 31 community-based classrooms. Only three SuperStart Plus Experimental Pre-K classes (with 54 children) are housed within the public school.

Partners: Volunteers of America; United Cerebral Palsy; child care

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Agency for Child Development subsidies; parent fees

NEW YORK CITY OVERALL

Description: The largest school system in the country, with a student population of 1.1 million, has a total of 675 elementary schools, 197 middle schools, and 213 high schools.

UPK Program: In 2000–01, 38,303 children were enrolled in a UPK program in New York City. Sixty-eight percent of the programs are located in community-based sites, and 32 percent of the programs are in public schools.

Partners: Head Start; child care; nursery schools; special education; family day care

Funding Sources: State pre-K funds; Title I, Special Education; Standards Allocation Funds; Agency for Child Development subsidies

Districts have reported other challenges as well, including lack of state funding for transportation of children (especially from half-day programs to wrap around child care); the lack of cross-district contracting, which prevents districts from contracting for prekindergarten services outside their borders—a limitation that leaves families with fewer options in areas where regulated early care and education programs are scarce; and the unpredictability of funding, a hardship both for school districts (some of which may decide not to adopt the program) and for community-based programs, which rely on stable funding sources. Moreover, in New York, trying to meet the goals of reduced class size and expanded UPK programming has put extraordinary pressure on districts that are already struggling with limited facilities.

Ensuring the continued funding of UPK has also been a struggle. Current funding is at a minimum of $2,700 per child, an amount intended to cover the cost of operating a 2½-hour UPK program. The original 1997 legislation called for a range of $2,000 to $4,000 per pupil and allocations of $50 million, $100 million, $225 million, and $500 million respectively over a period of four years. As of this publication, the budget for 2002 is still in question. In previous budget negotiations, the State Assembly and Senate and the Governor's Office have expressed substantially different positions on how this program should be funded and whether it should be available to all children. Although most observers expect a compromise (which will ensure the continuation of the program), greater financial commitment will be needed for the state to attain its goal of reaching all children.

MEETING NEW NEEDS

Over the two and a half days of the forum, participants covered a wide range of issues, delving into the intricacies of implementing universal prekindergarten on the ground while envisioning a new conceptual framework for an education system that includes the early learning years. In each of the areas they explored, a number of specific needs emerged, for which they offered suggestions for action. These suggestions, enumerated below, begin to define a blueprint for expanding the boundaries of the current system and bringing along other players in realizing that vision.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

- School boards, principals, and teachers need to be educated about brain research, the findings about the first years of life, and effective and appropriate early childhood practices.
- To better make the case for the advantages of high-quality early childhood education, there is a strong need for more community-specific research—such as longitudinal studies—on the outcomes for children who have been in preschool.
- To help counteract concerns about intrusion into the private domain of the family in the early years of a child's life—and to increase support for preschool programs—members of the public need to be educated about the benefits of early education and the positive experiences of states involved in early childhood initiatives.
- To achieve buy-in from legislators, business leaders, and other policymakers for greater investments in early learning, more effective communications and marketing strategies must be cultivated and supported.

How do you get business support for your early childhood education programs? Prove they are successful. Show the results of the use of objective data. Show that they have a positive impact on a child's reading ability and academic performance as they go through school. Show the link between early childhood education and the child's ability to meet the standards of education in your state.

R. CARLOS CARBALLADA,
CHAIRMAN, EDUCATION COMMITTEE,
NEW YORK STATE BUSINESS COUNCIL

SYSTEMICALLY LINKING PRE-K AND K-12

- To sustain the documented success of high-quality preschool programming, schools themselves need to be in tune with the demands of a complex, technological society as well as the changing needs of modern families.
- To ensure the seamless transitions that are essential to a responsive education system, states need to re-orient their thinking toward standards that establish a framework for curriculum development in pre-K through 12.

COLLABORATION

- As they engage in designing and implementing early childhood initiatives, school districts need to work with existing early childhood programs in the community, providing shared resources and common assessment strategies.

I don't think school people are there, by and large. They believe the mission of school is academics, and we're already overburdened with doing social service things that have crept into the schools. So they don't understand that collaborating with the community reduces that burden.

MARY JO KRAMER,
SUPERINTENDENT, MILFORD SCHOOL
DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

- If outcomes for children and families are to be successful, collaboration cannot be seen as an end in itself; it must have a focus and must articulate the means to a specific end.
- To ensure the viability and sustainability of local early childhood initiatives, states need to provide support and resources for collaboration and other efforts at building infrastructure—including training, assessment tools, and financing and funding mechanisms.

FACILITIES AND FINANCING

- Communities need to creatively use existing facilities and new sources of space, among them buildings no longer needed by businesses because of down-sizing or consolidation, and military facilities that have been closed.
- Categorical funding is important for maintaining the integrity of special programs that might not otherwise be supported by general operating funds.

Each of the agencies of our collaboration has wrap-around child care, for which they receive payment directly from the parents or DDS [now OCFS] money. The benefit of UPK is that curriculum that is developed there is also affecting the children in wrap-around child care. So the overall child care of those children has improved dramatically as a result of UPK funding and curriculum.

JAMES LEE, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS,
BINGHAMTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

- To maximize resources and provide options for parents that extend beyond half-day programming, districts should look at creative financing models that use money from a variety of sources, including Title I, child care, and Head Start.

EPILOGUE

In the months since the forum, reports from superintendents and other education leaders on the front lines have been extremely gratifying. Forum participants have played major roles in a number of statewide and local initiatives and activities that reflect the shared goals of the group.

In March 2001 the New York State Education Department and the New York State Prekindergarten Directors' Association co-sponsored a conference in Albany, "Supporting and Strengthening Early Childhood Programs: Meaningful Child Assessment, Teacher Practice and Program Accountability." Forum participants served as speakers at this conference, which brought together early childhood administrators from across the state. Also on the state level in New York, a series of regional forums is being held to discuss how schools with grade pre-K-3 configurations can best be included in a System of Accountability for Student Success. The choice of the site for the first forum was Binghamton, inspired by James Lee's panel presentation and ensuing discussions during the Pocantico meeting's work sessions.

Activity in some of the districts represented by the superintendents at Pocantico is proceeding apace. The School District of Ithaca continues to move toward a more systemic approach to staff development, in an effort to incorporate early childhood education into the district's larger framework for schooling. The Superintendent Conference Day in the district now includes staff from community-based sites, and the district is also conducting a longitudinal study on the educational outcomes of UPK. The Syracuse School District has rolled out a streamlined pre-K-through-12 curriculum, increasing linkages between UPK programs and the K-12 system. Inspired by the discussion of the need for more local research, the Olean School District is conducting a study of fifth, sixth, and seventh graders who were enrolled in the Even Start program as young children. The Office of Early Childhood of New York City's Board of Education sponsored its second annual universal prekindergarten conference, "UPK Partnerships for Children: The Vision and the Voice," which drew early childhood practitioners from the city's 32 school districts.

To capture in print the content and spirit of the superintendents' policy forum at Pocantico, it was necessary to place it in time, with a particular set of defining characteristics. However, the conversation and the work continue. The prevailing political winds, which drive state initiatives focused on assessment, accountability, and higher standards, necessarily shape the education reform agenda. New York's universal prekindergarten program continues to face competing priorities. However, the vision of the Pocantico participants is holding fast, and they will not be deterred from the work that lies ahead.

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* *These individuals contributed to the preparation and review of this report.*

AGENDA

TOWARD A NEW EDUCATION FRAMEWORK: EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES TO INCLUDE UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN (UPK)

A Child Care Action Campaign Policy Forum for New York State School Superintendents

Wednesday, December 6

6:30 P.M. Welcome, reception, and dinner

Thursday, December 7

8:30 A.M. Welcome and introductions

8:45 A.M. Plenary session

Meeting the Standards for all Children:
Effective Early Education Strategies
Inez Tenenbaum, State Superintendent, South Carolina

10:30 A.M. Early Care and Education Partnerships: A Look at Best Practices

A moderated forum concerning public education and community partnerships with Head Start, child care, and other preschool programs; standards and quality assurance; and staffing and funding

Dr. Judith Pastel, Superintendent, Ithaca City School District, New York

Dr. James E. Lee, Superintendent, Binghamton School District, New York

Mary Jo Kramer, Superintendent, Milford School District, Connecticut

Ray McNulty, Superintendent of Schools, Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, Vermont

Moderator: Faith Wohl, President, Child Care Action Campaign

1:00–5:15 P.M. Two sets of work sessions to discuss and craft UPK policy recommendations and implementation strategies

1:00–3:00 P.M.
- Incorporating early childhood programs in the school readiness agenda
- Strengthening teaching
- Engaging community-based early childhood programs in the implementation of UPK systems

3:15–5:15 P.M.
- Incorporating early childhood programs in the school readiness agenda
- Strengthening teaching
- Financing early childhood programs

5:45 P.M. Reception and dinner

8:15 P.M. Working groups' synthesis of major points and recommendations

Friday, December 8

8:30 A.M. Engaging Business as a Champion for Early Education
R. Carlos Carballada
Chair, The Business Council's Education Committee

9:30–11:30 A.M. Final Working groups' synthesis of major points and recommendations

11:30 A.M. Next steps

NOON–1:00 P.M. Lunch and wrap-up

THE ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND AND ITS POCANTICO PROGRAMS

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a private foundation, was established in 1940 by the five sons and daughter of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in order to coordinate their philanthropic interests and to help realize the shared ideals of the Rockefeller family. On July 1, 1999, the Charles E. Culpeper Foundation of Stamford, Connecticut, merged with the RBF. The Fund's major objective is to promote the well-being of all people through support of efforts in the United States and abroad that contribute ideas, develop leaders, and encourage institutions in the transition to global interdependence.

The Fund makes grants in eight program areas. In its Sustainable Resource Use program the Fund works to foster environmental stewardship which is ecologically based, economically sound, culturally appropriate, and sensitive to questions of intergenerational equity. Its Global Security program aims to contribute to the emergence of a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world by improving the cooperative management of transnational threats and challenges. The Fund's other program interests are: promoting and sustaining a vital Nonprofit Sector; encouraging the participation of individuals and communities in the civic life of New York City by promoting inclusive public discourse and action on issues of local and citywide concern and by strengthening the capacity for leadership and engagement at the community level; providing quality early childhood Education and care to all children and, at a time of profound demographic shifts, encouraging outstanding people of color to enter the teaching profession; and improving the quality and accessibility of basic education for children and adults in South Africa. The Arts and Culture program works to create access with the goal of building greater understanding and appreciation of various art forms or cultural activities. The Health program supports projects involving research and education in the field of human health.

The Pocantico Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund is located in the Pocantico Historic Area, the heart of the Rockefeller Family estate in Westchester County, New York. The Historic Area, which is owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and leased by the Fund, includes John D. Rockefeller's home, Kykuit, the surrounding gardens and sculpture collections, and the Coach Barn meeting facility. At Pocantico, the Fund convenes a wide range of meetings and conferences related to its philanthropic programs. In connection with its conference program, the Fund publishes a series of occasional reports, called Pocantico Papers, designed to widen the impact of selected RBF-sponsored meetings at the Conference Center. The Pocantico Programs also include a public visitation program and year-round stewardship of the site.